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## Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad; Pettit; Chpts 26-27; 1879

Eber Pettit

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## CHAPTER XVI.

CASSEY ESCAPES FROM BALTIMORE—RETURNS FOR HER CHILD—ESCAPES AGAIN IN SAILOR COSTUME—ELUDES THE SLAVE CATCHER, CATHCART—GOES TO CANADA—RETURNS TO NIAGARA FALLS, N. Y.—THE SLAVE CATCHER FINDS HER—A LONG RIDE AND HOW IT CAME OUT—AN INTELLIGENT IRISHMAN—WHAT MARGARET\* DID FOR HIM.

Cassey was a slave in Baltimore; her master's name was Claggett. She had been assured by those who knew, that she was about to be sold to a man who was making up a coffle for the markets in Louisiana or Texas. None but slaves can imagine the terror felt in view of such a prospect. Cassey fled like a frightened bird, and succeeded in reaching a place of safety near Haddonfield, N. J., where she obtained service in a respectable family. She was industrious, steady and honest, and her cheerful, obliging manners secured her many friends, yet a sadness was ever present on her countenance, for she had left in Baltimore a child, little more than a year old. Her master had not been unusually severe, but she had experienced and witnessed enough of slavery to dread it for her child, and she therefore determined to make a desperate effort to save her little one from the liability of being sold and treated like a mere brute. The kind Quaker people among whom she had

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\*See Margaret, Chapter XII.

found a home tried to dissuade her from attempting so hazardous an enterprise, deeming it not only dangerous, but well nigh hopeless ; but the mother's heart yearned for her babe, and she finally decided to try to save it at all hazards.

She went to Baltimore and proceeded directly to the house of a colored family, old friends of hers, in whom she could safely confide. To her great joy she found that they approved her plan and were ready to assist her. Arrangements were soon made to convey the child to a place about twenty miles from Baltimore, where it would be well taken care of until the mother could safely take it to New Jersey.

Before she could leave the city her master was informed that she was there and sent constables in pursuit of her, but her friends were apprized of it in season to give her warning, and her own courage and ingenuity were adequate to the emergency. She disguised herself in sailor's clothes and walked boldly to the Philadelphia boat. There she walked up and down the deck smoking a cigar, occasionally passing and re-passing the constables who had been sent to take her. The constables left the boat after waiting till it was about to start ; they were watching for a colored woman to come on board answering to her description.

The boat brought her safely to Philadelphia, and she soon reached her friends in Haddonfield, who rejoiced over the history of her escape and the success of her enterprise. A few weeks after she went to the place where her child had been left, and succeeded in bringing it away in safety.

For a short time her happiness seemed to be complete ; but she soon began to be harassed with fears that her master would succeed in finding them and take them both back to slavery. At length she resolved to go to

Philadelphia, which was not far distant, and get the advice of Benjamin Harrison, a Quaker who was ever ready to aid fugitives from slavery. He advised her to leave her child in the care of a family living quite remote from public travel, where it would be entirely safe, and go herself farther north. Acting upon friend Harrison's advice, she had placed her child in the care of the family that he recommended and returned to Philadelphia, intending to start north in a day or two; but, passing along the street in which her friend lived, she met Cathcart, the speculator to whom she had been sold. Hurrying forward she reached the door of her friend in time to go in before he could get hold of her. Harrison saw the chase and locked his doors. Cathcart placed men about the house to watch while he went for constables and a warrant. It was evening, and the offices being closed, he was slow in obtaining his papers; meanwhile, in passing through his kitchen, Harrison saw that two of his domestics seemed very merry over some project they had on foot, and he watched their movements. One of them put on an old cloak and a dilapidated bonnet, and opening the front door looked up and down the street; then rushing out she turned a corner and ran with all her might. The watchers saw it all, sprang from their hiding places and overtook her. She screamed and called for the police, who soon arrived and took all parties into custody. During the excitement Cassey escaped, and before Cathcart returned with his constables she was crossing the Delaware River in a skiff. She was so terribly frightened by this adventure that she determined not to stop again short of Canada. Having saved her earnings she was able to travel by steamboat and canal packet, and soon arrived in Canada and found friends and a home at Lundy's Lane, near Niagara Falls.

Cassey's boy was a fine, active little fellow, and she determined to earn money to buy his freedom, for, being a very capable woman, she commanded high wages. The agent of the U. G. R. R., at Niagara Falls, was a wealthy gentleman, living some two miles back from the river, where he had an excellent farm, a fine mansion, splendid stock and superb horses. All the negro servants at the Falls were in the secret service of the institution, and not a few of the white citizens were friendly toward it. When Cassey had been in Canada three or four years our agent above mentioned applied to her to engage in his service, and as he would pay her much higher wages than she could obtain in Canada, she, supposing that all danger had passed, came over on the Suspension Bridge and went to work for him. She never went into the village except to go occasionally to meeting on Sunday. One Sunday, as she passed out of the church, she saw a man standing near the door, sharply scanning the features of every colored person that came out. Her eyes met his and they recognized each other, but she managed to get away in the crowd and he lost sight of her.

The facilities offered by the fugitive slave law for capturing runaway slaves had made it a profitable business, and Cathcart had bought "running" a large lot of fugitives, expecting to make a good speculation if he could capture even one in ten of them. He had come on to the Falls, rightly guessing that some of them would be about there, and he was at the church door in pursuit of his regular business. One of the shrewdest men, either white or black, that lived in that village, was Ben Jackson, a free negro. Ben was a servant in the hotel where Cathcart was stopping, and he had already, as was his custom, taken pains to talk with other colored servants in Cathcart's presence about the slaves running away

and coming here to work for almost nothing, saying, "we 'spectable niggers can't get anything to do half the time, and we get drefful little for it when we get a place. They ought to be tuck back where they belong." Cathcart went directly to Ben, and taking him aside, he described Cassey, told where he saw her, and inquired if Ben knew her. "Yes," said Ben, "I knows her. She lives over to Lundy's Lane. She comes over on the Suspension Bridge sometimes to Methodist meeting." Cathcart had already engaged a score of shaggy Democrats to start at his bidding, and he sent two of them without delay to watch the bridge, and others were sent to all the crossing places between Tonawanda and Youngstown, the gate-keeper at the bridge having told him that no such person had crossed over to Canada that day.

Ben lost no time in sending word to Cassey and to Col. P——, with whom she lived, telling them how he had misled the slave hunter. As soon as it was dark a trusty conductor started with Cassey towards Lockport, and Col. P—— had his fleetest team harnessed to a close carriage, standing in his barn ready to start at a moment's warning.

Cathcart came back from the bridge, and calling the landlord aside, told him that he had seen one of the slaves that he was looking for; he also related what Ben had said to him. "Well," said the landlord, "Ben is a trusty fellow generally, but you ought to know better than to confide in any negro on business relating to fugitives." "But I heard him saying that the runaway niggers were working for low wages and ought to be sent back." "Ben said that," replied the landlord, "when he knew you would hear it. Did the woman recognize you?" "I think she did," said Cathcart. "Then," said the landlord, "no time is to be lost. She has no doubt

gone to Col. P——. He has wealth and influence, and whatever you do with him must be done legally. You have the law and the strongest party in the State on your side, while he knows just how much or how little the law can do for you. He has at his command means for hiding and running off these people that no one has yet found out. They call it the Underground Railroad. *They must go under ground or by balloon*, for once in his hands they are never seen again this side of the river."

The President had not been so careless of the interests of his slaveholding friends who visit the Falls as to leave them without the means of reclaiming their fugitive servants. A Commissioner and Marshals were located there, so that Cathcart, although it was Sunday evening, had his papers in the Marshal's hands as soon as possible, and he, with his deputies, were by ten o'clock, p. m., approaching Col. P——'s place by different roads. Meanwhile, the Colonel had his spies out, and he was on the front seat of his carriage, with his driver, in his barn.

When the Marshal drew near, a signal was given, the barn door opened suddenly, and the Colonel, with the fastest team in Niagara County, dashed out and down the road toward Lewiston. The Marshal was coming on that road and tried to stop him, but he passed on and was followed by the officers who tried to get ahead. The Colonel tantalized them by allowing them to come alongside, but to get by or to stop him was out of the question. Thus he led them all the way to the ferry at Youngstown, having passed Lewiston without stopping. At Youngstown he allowed them to drive past him, but before the Marshal could get to him he turned about and started back toward home, the officers still keeping in sight of him until he drove into his barn. When he stopped the officers were close by, and rushing up to both sides of the carriage, were astonished to find no

person inside of it, the Colonel having been careful to allow them to keep near enough to know positively that no person had left the carriage since it started. "Come into the house, gentlemen, and have some refreshments," said the Colonel. "Bill, rub down their horses, they are a fine team, and have tried the bottom of my grays. I thought you would give it up at Lewiston, but as you decided to go on I thought if any team in this county could show better bottom for a long drive than mine, I should like to know it." By this time the Marshal had made up his mind that there was no game there, and he drove on without waiting for Bill to groom his horses or to hold any conversation with the Colonel.

One of the best conductors in Niagara County was an Irishman by the name of Dennis W—. He lived on a good farm between the canal and the ridge road, about four miles from Lockport. He was active, intelligent and industrious. I first knew him as an active member of the Liberty Party, and afterwards as a conductor on the U. G. R. R. When Col. P— found the crossing dangerous, he sent passengers to Dennis, while he managed to mislead the hunters. The conductor who took Cassey to his station, told Dennis not to keep her about his own premises, for he was beginning to be suspected. Dennis had a friend who came from Ireland a year or two previous, and he had fixed up a place for him to live in on a remote part of his farm. Supposing it would be a safe place for Cassey to stop a few days, he went to see if he would take her into his house, and said to him, "Jimmy, I have a favor to ask of you." "Ye shall have it before I know what it is," said Jimmy, "though it might be half of my kingdom!" "It isn't that," said Dennis, "I only want a place for a poor woman to stay a few days." He then told who she was, and gave a thrilling account of her troubles and the terrible things



she would have to suffer if she was captured. When he had told her story it had just got into Jim's head that she was a negro, and he exclaimed, "It's a nagur ye would bring here, is it? I'll have none of it! It's the same that's coming here in swarms if they make Linkin and that other nagur President; and won't they work for nothing, and then the poor folks can get no work? and was n't that what the man said at the Dimicrat meeting up there to Lockport?—and they are coming already, are they? No, no, away wid 'em!" When Jimmy had given vent to his feelings and his fears, Dennis said, "I will tell you a short story. You know I came over here twenty-five years ago, and left Mary and her baby to come when I could earn money to send for them. Well, I was sick on the ship, and when I landed in New York I was sick, and had no money and no place to go to. I wandered in the streets too sick to work or to eat, and after a while I think I lost my senses, for I awoke one morning and could n't imagine where I was. After a while a woman spoke to me and said, 'are you better? you will get well and go and see Mary.' I said, 'where is Mary?' She replied, 'I do n't know. You have talked about her, and I guess she is away in Ireland.' She brought some food and I ate a very little. The room was dark, so I had not seen her face; when she brought a light I saw that she was as black as a boot. I should have been frightened, but her voice was sweet, and she spoke so tenderly that I did not mind her looks.

"The woman who saved my life was called Margaret. She had been a slave and escaped, bringing off her little boy. She had found me lying on her door-step, almost dead, taken me in and nursed me into life again. When I was well enough to work she kept me until I found work, and then lent me money to send for Mary and the

boy. Well, I can't stop now to tell how I prospered and bought this farm, went to school—yes, went to school with children, and when I had been here the proper time I was naturalized, and supposed I was a Democrat and would vote their ticket. At the first election I attended, a man gave me a vote and said, 'you are a Democrat, of course, and here is another vote.' I said, 'what is that?' and looking at it I saw it was something about the Constitution. He said it was to prevent negroes from voting if they had not real estate worth \$250, and I said, 'can't Irishmen vote until they have real estate?' 'Oh, yes,' said he, 'but the negroes are ignorant.' Said I, 'the first person that treated me kindly in this country was a black negro, was once a slave, and it took me five years to learn what she knew then of books, and as to general information she was better informed than her white neighbors. Her son, Samuel R. Ward, was an educated gentleman, and I see no reason why he should not vote as well as I. No, sir,' said I, 'if that is Democratic doctrine I can't vote your ticket,' and now I see the same party are at their old tricks. They tell you that black men will do all the work for nothing. It is not because men are black that they work for nothing, but because they are held in slavery. When all men become free citizens labor will command its value."

"What do you say," said Dennis, "shall I bring her here for a few days?" "Yes," said Jimmy, "let her come, and may the holy Virgin forget me when I'm in sorest need if I let a spalpeen of a Democrat hurt a hair of her head."

She had been at Jimmy's place but a short time when the rebels fired on our flag, after which Cassey went back and found her boy, and as fugitives were now safe in New Jersey she decided to remain with her Quaker friends.

## CHAPTER XVII.

TOM HAWKINS—NEGROES AND POOR WHITES IN KENTUCKY—TOM RUNS HIS OWN TRAIN—SELLS HIS SHIRT TO PAY HIS FARE AT THE FERRY—IS BORN INTO GOD'S FREE AIR ALMOST AS NAKED AS HE WAS BORN INTO SLAVERY—HIS MODESTY, INDUSTRY, INTELLIGENCE AND PROSPERITY.

It has been a common belief in the Free States that the slaves in the South were the most ignorant and the most stupid human beings to be found in any country blessed with Christian civilization, and from that idea, mainly, has arisen the fear in the minds of many good people that the Republican doctrine of universal, loyal, manhood suffrage may prove a disastrous experiment. As an offset to such grounds of fear, it may be well to remember that there is a large class of white men living in the midst of the black population in the old slave States, who are even more ignorant, more stupid, and in all respects more degraded than the slaves were, the slaveholders themselves being judges, yet the "poor white trash," as the aristocracy and even the slaves call them, have equal rights at the ballot box with their rich and intelligent neighbors. Since the slaves were emancipated, schools have been established for the benefit of all classes, black and white, of which the blacks almost universally avail themselves, while the aforesaid class of poor whites, with few exceptions, treat every attempt to educate and elevate them with utmost scorn.

When traveling in the slave States twenty years ago, I found this class of white people unable to give any information as to the distance to the nearest town, and not one in ten knew the name of the county where they lived. Between Paris and Winchester, Ky., a heavy shower came upon us, and we found shelter in a house in the edge of the woods. A man and his wife, and five or six children, were in the house, and the combined wisdom of the household could give us no information as to how far it was to either of the above towns. "It was a right smart chance of a walk," and that was all they knew about it, nor did they know the name of the county they lived in, or the political party the "old man" voted for; he thought, however, his name was not "political party." "Was it Harry Clay?" "No, it was t'other feller." When the shower was over we started towards Winchester, and soon met an old negro passing along the road. Stopping our horse, I said, "Good evening, uncle." He took off his hat and responded, "Good evening, sar." I said, "Put your hat on your head, my friend, you are an old man." He looked at us, then at his hat, and finally put his hat under his arm, and stood uneasily, turning partly around. Seeing that he felt embarrassed, I thought I would ask him some questions, and see if the old negro was as ignorant as the Loco Foco voter whose roof had partially sheltered us during the late shower, so I asked, "How far is it to Winchester?" "Bout four mile." "How far to Paris?" "Ten or twelve mile," he replied, both of which answers proved correct. "Can you tell us what county we are in?" "Dis am Clark County," said he, "but just ober dar is Bourbon County," and pointing west, he said, "dat way, bout two mile, am Fayette County."

We found the old slave quite intelligent on many subjects. I asked him where he lived, and he said, "In

Fayette County, most down to Lexington. I'se looking for de mules; Massa Hawkins' mules am run off." When we started along he put his hat on, then snatching it off again, he said, "Please, master, do you live down to Louisville?" I answered, "No; why do you wish to know?" "Cause," said he, "my boy Tom was sold down de river, and I hear he cook on steamboat, and come to Louisville sometimes. His old mother wants to hear if he is alive." As we did not live in Louisville, we could give the old man no news to carry to Tom's mother. Whether the old woman ever heard about Tom going ashore near Louisville and getting *lost*, and not finding his way back again, I do not know, but that such was his fate I have no doubt, nor am I quite sure that his arrival in Canada can be justly credited to the U. G. R. R., for he "paddled his own canoe" and engineered his own train on independent principles.

On the 15th of the present month (September, 1868), I met on the steamboat between Mayville and Jamestown, Dr. C——, a gentleman with whom I had some business transactions in Canada more than twenty years ago. He was then a merchant, and carried on an extensive distillery and ashery at a village some eight or ten miles from St. David's. We did not recognize each other at first, until he incidentally mentioned the name of Hon. Hamilton Merritt, whose wife was the daughter of Mr. P——, one of the first settlers in Jamestown. Recollecting that Mr. Merritt lived in Canada, I asked the gentleman if he had lived there. He answered that he had, and we soon renewed our acquaintance. One of our party asked him if he was acquainted with any of the fugitives who went there. He said he had employed several of them, one of whom was the strongest man he had ever seen. His name was Jack. One day Jack drove to the ashery with a load of wood, and came to the house and

asked for a shirt. He had found a negro in the woods who had no clothes except a part of a pair of pants. Jack was a very large man, and his shirts were too large for the fugitive, so he asked for a donation to clothe the poor fellow. A comfortable suit of clothes was soon provided, and Jack brought the boy in with his next load of wood; he was taken to the kitchen, where he was warmed and fed, and at night a comfortable place was provided for him to sleep in.

The next morning when the Doctor got up, he found his boots and the shoes and boots of all his family nicely brushed and "shined up," and when he came home at evening he noticed that the wood was all piled in his wood-house in a very orderly manner, and on going to his horse barn and carriage house he found the barn swept and put in order, harnesses and carriages brushed and cleaned, and the poor fugitive was there putting things in order generally. Going up to him, Dr. C—— said, "Who has been meddling with these things?" "Beg pardon," said the boy, "I had nothing else to do." "Well," said the Doctor, "go into the kitchen and get your supper." On inquiry, he learned that the boy had been busy every moment during the day, though his feet were in a terrible condition, and his body reduced by starvation to a mere skeleton.

After tea the boy was invited into the sitting room, and the Doctor said to him, "What is your name?" He replied, "It am Tom Hawkins."

Tom seemed afraid to talk about himself, but the Doctor assured him that he was safe, and that no person could claim him as a slave, and he was finally induced to relate his adventures. He had been a servant on a steamboat on the Mississippi river, and had been kind and serviceable to a passenger who was very sick on the boat. Tom found out that the man might be trusted,

and ventured to ask him how he could obtain his freedom. He advised him to secrete himself on a boat that was lying near where they had stopped and keep himself hidden among the freight until they got to Pittsburgh, then showing him the north star and teaching him the way to find it, he told him to go towards it until he came to water that he could not see across, then turn to the right and keep within sight of it until he could see land and houses on the other side ; "that," said he, "is Canada. Get over there and you will be a free man."

Tom Hawkins had witnessed more than once cases of excruciating torture inflicted on defenseless, captured fugitives, and knew that just such punishment awaited him if he should fail in an attempt to gain his freedom ; but such was his yearning for liberty, the prompting of his untutored manhood, that he did not shrink from the trial. He was so fortunate as to smuggle himself on board a boat that favored his escape as far as Pittsburgh, but when he found himself alone on the north shore of the river, a few miles below the city, without food, except a small supply for a day or two, no clothes except a light summer suit, ignorant of the geography of the country, and of any direct route to a place of safety that seemed to him to exist only in imagination ; and worst of all, beholding an enemy, as he supposed, in every human being that he met, in the dreariness of a dark, rainy night in the woods, he thought over the horrid scenes he had been compelled to look upon, of captured fugitives that had been returned to slavery by virtue of the fugitive slave law, and whipped to death as a warning to any who thought of running away. Tom was not discouraged by all this. He sat down and called to mind the instruction his friend gave him about the way to the place where all are free, and determined to follow it out without the least variation ; consequently he did not go

forward until nearly morning, when the clouds broke and he obtained his bearings by a sight of the north star.

It would be tedious to follow him through long days waiting in the woods, and longer nights when clouds obscured his only guide. He went sometimes in the roads, then in woods or fields, and at length arrived at the ridge of highland south of Erie, Pa., when all at once he looked down upon the "wide water," as it had been described. It was to Tom as if all material things had disappeared, and heaven burst suddenly into view. To him, that beautiful panorama of woods and fields, towns and rural homes, and the broad lake beyond with no shore in sight, was a sure token that all his friend had said to him was true, not only as to the way that he should go, but also regarding the liberty, prosperity and protection that he should enjoy at the end of his perilous journey. So cautious was he that he traveled mostly in fields, woods, and through bushes, living on such corn, vegetables and fruits as he could procure, and when he arrived at the ferry near Lewiston, he had worn out all his clothes except his shirt and pants, and lost his hat. He was sitting near the boat when the ferryman and some passengers came in the morning, and just as they were starting he stepped on board. The boatsman demanded a shilling for his passage, and as he had no shilling he was ordered off the boat, but Tom stripped off his shirt and offered to sell it for a shilling, and finding a purchaser, he paid his fare and went over. In his extreme caution he had avoided being seen even by our vigilant U. G. R. R. agents, and now found himself born into God's free air almost as naked as he was born into slavery. Hence, as it was early in the morning, he managed to get through the village of Queenstown and into a place where he stayed until evening, when he



started along the road, and in the morning laid down exhausted, starved and cold by a pile of food, where Jack found him and "took him in" as above related.

Tom Hawkins proved himself worthy of the freedom he had achieved. It was edifying to witness the enthusiasm of the Doctor in speaking of Tom's capabilities. He employed him as a "man of all work" at \$15 per month, high wages for that time. Tom had a "weakness" that stood in the way of financial prosperity, namely, a soft heart toward everybody that wanted to borrow his money, and so many of these were lazy, dishonest scamps, that at the end of six months he had nothing to show for the wages he had earned except a suit of clothes. The Doctor advised him to take better care of his money, so as to buy him a home. "Well, then," said Tom, "you must keep my money, and when I ask for money to lend to a lazy chap that won't pay, you can just get mad and not let me have it." About that time a man offered for sale fifteen acres of heavily timbered land two miles from town, and the Doctor proposed to Tom to buy it. He hesitated about getting into debt, but Dr. C—— said, "I will take care of that." "Well, then," said Tom, "you know best, master." Tom always persisted in calling him "master." At the end of five years Tom had paid for his land, and bought one of the best teams in the country, and a first rate harness and wagon, and commenced marketing his wood. The Doctor said that one of Tom's peculiarities was that when he purchased anything for his own use he always bought the best that was to be had. An English gentleman living in the town had, in his family, a handsome colored girl. She was well educated, industrious, and a very capable housekeeper, of a sunny temper and agreeable address. Tom built a good house, and then asked this girl to become his wife. They were married, and

Tom Hawkins is now regarded as one of the most thrifty farmers in the district. His farm, his house, his barns, and everything that appertains to them are kept in the neatest possible condition, and his note or his word is good for any sum that he would ask for, and I might add that when he became a freeholder in Canada he became a voter. How many white boys with nothing but their hands, their energy, talents and good conduct for capital in starting in the world, can show a better record than Tom Hawkins?